

Meat Industry Consultative Council

Wednesday 11 March 2015

Summary of meeting outcomes

The Meat Industry Consultative Council (MICC) held a meeting in Sydney on Wednesday, 11 March 2015. Specific issues considered by the Council at its meeting are detailed below.

Foodborne illness report analysis

Members viewed a presentation on the results of a number of cases of foodborne illness in Australia. Issues of importance for the Meat Industry were highlighted.

Food Safety Program compliance report 1 July to 31 December 2014

The Council noted the Food Safety Program compliance report for the meat and poultry sector for the period 1 July to 31 December 2014.

Activities undertaken during this period included 684 acceptable rated audits, 91 failed audits and 464 inspections. The audit failure rate for the retail meat sector of 11.2% indicated little change from the previous period rate of 12%. During the reporting period, none of the meat retail businesses that failed a compliance audit, also failed their follow up audit, indicating that licensees are implementing effective corrective actions in response to audit failures.

Enforcement activities during the period included the issue of 133 improvement notices, 34 penalty notices, 8 warning letters, 1 prohibition order and 2 product seizures.

Microbiological verification and surveillance program report

Members received an update on the Authority's verification program, which involves ongoing random sampling and testing of selected ready-to-eat (RTE) products manufactured in NSW under the Regulation with testing requirements.

From July 2009 to June 2014, a total of 1271 RTE food samples were tested. 535 pre packaged RTE meat products were tested and 97% of them complied with the regulatory requirements. The non-compliant samples contained *L. monocytogenes* or *E. coli*. 64 of the 535 samples were UCFM and they all complied with the *E. coli* limit prescribed in the NSW Food Safety Scheme Manual. The surveillance program is ongoing.

The Council were informed that there are 2 future projects planned for the meat industry: Poultry verification program, and Campylobacter in food survey.

Retail meat strategy

The Authority has worked closely with AMIC over the years to improve compliance rates in retail butcher shops. This work will enable the Authority to have further discussions with AMIC, and also those businesses, targeting work to identify significant contributors and cause of the failures. This will enable both educational and enforcement programs to be put in place to address the major and critical corrective action requests that are being detected at audit.

Members were shown data analysis highlighting 7 council areas where there are higher than normal audit failure rates. Data has been used to identify 44 businesses that make up the top non-compliant retail meat premises. The Authority will have a targeted program with those 44 businesses, to require sustained compliance over time.

The Authority has arranged with AMIC to attend the next retail council meeting with retailers in Sydney and they will be informed about the program.

Development and implementation of Key Food Safety Indicators (KFSI's) for poultry processors

The Authority implemented a monitoring program with large poultry processors, to target key process indicators relating to food safety to assist in providing a more efficient way to monitor compliance. The Authority is collecting data every month, from those parties who are contributing to this program. The cooperation of the companies involved is appreciated. The system has allowed the Authority to implement a simpler verification system at the farm level which reduces the audit burden on producers.

Those in attendance at the meeting who are involved expressed their support, as the data is being used to inform their own processes including back to farm. Committee members were supportive of the partnership approach between SafeFood QLD and the Authority, ensuring industry are not duplicating work. Both regulators have adopted the same process.

The Authority will keep monitoring the results of this project, and will arrange progress meetings with industry.

Pork supply chain integrity program

Australian Pork Limited (APL) presented a paper to members, detailing their current integrity and traceability programs.

- PigPass - a program used for identification and traceability of live animals, primarily to minimise the spread and facilitate the rapid containment of animal diseases.
- Physi-Trace is a traceback tool utilising trace elemental profiling.
- APIQ is the industry-sponsored on-farm Quality Assurance (QA) program, which covers 5 key areas of focus; management, food safety, animal welfare, biosecurity and traceability.

The Authority will have further discussion with APL about Physi-Trace, and the online auditing system, but confirmed that there is no intention to mandate QA programs on-farm.

Importance of the food recall process

A paper was tabled outlining the NSW Food Authority recalls process, and how they are triggered. A poster showing the recall process was also tabled for members' information.

Members were informed that the Authority's use of social media to distribute recall information has proven effective with the public.

Animal welfare training programs in non red-meat abattoirs

Members were informed that the NSW Food Authority had partnered with Southern Queensland Institute of TAFE (SQIT), to develop a nationally recognised animal welfare course for poultry processing. They engaged Mark Rickard from SQIT and Dr Leisha Hewitt (a former senior lecturer in Animal Welfare at Murdoch University, with extensive experience from the UK in abattoir animal welfare systems) to deliver the course over 1.5 days, with both theory and practical elements.

NSW Food Authority audit officers attended, as did 56 employees from Inghams Chickens, Baiada Poultry, Red Lea Poultry and Cordina Chickens. There were also 10 representatives from medium sized facilities. Feedback was positive.

A guidance document and procedures manual was developed, and will be implemented by trained Food Authority staff at all 26 medium and small abattoirs by 31 March 2015.

Country of origin labelling (CoOL) meat single sign and Health Star Rating (HSR)

The Food Standards Code extended the CoOL law to include raw meat, to strengthen traceability. Ministers requested wording for a single signage for butcher shops, so they are not unnecessarily burdened by CoOL laws.

NSW agreed to lead the national process in developing this single signage. This required engagement with ACCC, and in December 2014 written approval was received for the proposed wording. This sign will go to all state agencies to review at the ISFR meeting 18 & 19 March.

Implementation will occur with retailers from July 2015 with full compliance to be enforced from July 2016.

The voluntary Health Star Rating (HSR) system was briefly discussed, and the marketing potential for packaged raw meat was pointed out to members.

The next meeting of the MICC will be held Wednesday 12 August 2015.